Navigating the African Academic Odyssey Through Triptych on Research Infrastructure, Policies, and Publishing: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Africa's academic and research landscape is at a critical juncture, shaped by evolving research infrastructures, policy frameworks, and scholarly publishing models. This study systematically reviews the current state of research ecosystems in African universities, assessing the effectiveness of existing policies in supporting research funding, intellectual property rights, and academic collaborations. Additionally, it evaluates the challenges and opportunities in scholarly publishing, particularly the impact of open-access initiatives, digital innovations, and the growing threat of predatory journals. The study employs a systematic review methodology, analyzing peer-reviewed literature and policy documents from reputable academic databases. Findings reveal that inadequate research infrastructure, limited funding, and fragmented policy frameworks hinder knowledge production and dissemination in Africa. However, strategic interventions, including increased government investment, strengthened institutional policies, and regional collaborations, present opportunities for regeneration. The study underscores the transformative potential of digital technologies and open-access publishing in improving research visibility and accessibility. It also highlights the urgent need to combat predatory publishing practices that threaten research integrity and academic progression. The findings have significant implications for research, practice, and policy, advocating for capacity-building initiatives, institutional partnerships, and sustainable funding mechanisms to enhance Africa's research ecosystem. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers, universities, and research institutions to develop resilient research infrastructures and ethical scholarly publishing frameworks that drive innovation and global competitiveness.

Keywords: Research infrastructure, scholarly publishing, policy frameworks, open-access, predatory publishing, African research ecosystem, academic funding, digital

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innovation.

Introduction

The interaction of scholarly publishing, policies, and research infrastructures is causing a dynamic shift in Africa's academic scene. Although the continent's increasing research output shows a greater dedication to knowledge production, academic advancement is still hampered by enduring issues like a lack of funding, poor infrastructure, shaky policy frameworks, and restricted access to high-impact publishing platforms (Akuru, 2019). The visibility and accessibility of African research are impacted by these structural obstacles, which result in a dependence on outside publication models and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge in international scholarly discourse (Mthombeni, 2024). The need for a comprehensive approach to strengthening research ecosystems has never been more pressing, particularly as Africa navigates the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and seeks to position itself as a competitive player in global knowledge economies.

Through a thorough examination, this study looks at the three interrelated pillars that shape the African academic experience: publication, policies, and research infrastructures. Scholarly activity is supported by research infrastructures, which include libraries, digital repositories, funding organizations, and cooperative networks. Inconsistent regulations, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the digital divide frequently limit the efficacy of these infrastructures, affecting the calibre and availability of research (Ocholla & Ocholla, 2020; Kuteesa, Akpuokwe., & Udeh et al., 2024). In the meanwhile, funding allocations, intellectual property rights, and research agendas are significantly shaped by policy frameworks in African academia. However, ineffective research governance has been caused by disjointed policies, a lack of enforcement, and external dependencies (Akande, 2022).

The third pillar of this triptych, scholarly publication, is still a controversial and developing area in Africa. High publishing fees, restricted access to indexed journals, and the rise of predatory journals are just a few of the obstacles that African scholars commonly face (Zell, 2025). These difficulties are made worse by the prevalence of Western-controlled publication methods, which frequently place African studies in the margins of international scholarly influence (Naidoo, Ndebele, Kercival, & Shabalala, 2024). However, there are now more chances to raise the profile and legitimacy of African research thanks to the growth of open-access publications, digital repositories, and regional journal platforms. A rising trend toward self-sufficient publishing ecosystems is represented by organizations like the African Journals Online (AJOL) and digital projects spearheaded by the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) (ARUA, 2022).

To address these interconnected challenges, there is a need for strong governmental reforms, long-term infrastructure investments, and a dedication to moral and open

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publishing norms as Africa looks to improve its research and academic publishing environment. It is impossible to undervalue the contribution that technology-driven solutions, financial partnerships, and international collaborations may make to closing current gaps and creating a more welcoming and equal academic environment (Zell, 2025). To provide insights into their intersections and combined influence on academic progress, this study will critically examine the body of literature currently available on the condition of research infrastructures, policies, and scholarly publications in Africa. By doing this, this study will add to the current discussions about how African academic communities, policymakers, and universities may manage the complexity of global knowledge production while preserving research integrity and intellectual sovereignty. In the end, the study aims to provide long-term methods for improving African scholarship, making sure that it is influential, accessible, and representative of the various knowledge systems found on the continent.

Statement of the Problem

Africa's scholarly prominence, research quality, and publication capacity are nevertheless hampered by institutional hurdles, despite the continent's expanding academic communities and rising research production. Researchers' capacity to carry out and publish significant research is hampered by the absence of strong research infrastructures, such as well-stocked libraries, digital repositories, and funding sources (Ezema & Eze, 2024). Disparities in the creation and sharing of knowledge are exacerbated by the lack of proper digital infrastructure and limited access to academic databases in many African institutions (Aldirdiri, 2024; Ocholla, 2020). Further limiting research development are fragmented policies and lax enforcement. Reliance on outside funding sources and publication platforms results from policies implemented by many African governments and institutions that ignore problems including intellectual property rights, open-access publishing, and research finance (Mensah, 2024). This reliance diminishes local control over research goals and marginalizes African expertise in international academic discourse. Additionally, there are still obstacles to scholarly publishing, such as exorbitant publishing costs, restricted access to indexed journals, and the growth of predatory publishing, which compromises academic advancement and research integrity (Shrestha, 2024). The underutilization of Africa's scholarly potential will perpetuate current disparities in the production of knowledge worldwide unless deliberate measures are taken to improve the continent's publishing systems, regulatory frameworks, and research infrastructures.

Objectives of the Study

The study investigated how research infrastructures, policies, and scholarly publications are intertwined in forming the academic environment in Africa and suggested long-term methods for improving African research. The specific objectives were to:

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1. Assess the current state of research infrastructures in African universities and their impact on knowledge production and dissemination.
2. Analyze the effectiveness of existing policy frameworks in supporting research funding, intellectual property rights, and academic collaborations in Africa.
3. Identify the strategic interventions and policy recommendations aimed at strengthening Africa's research ecosystems and fostering sustainable academic publishing models.
4. Identify the challenges and opportunities in scholarly publishing, particularly regarding access to reputable journals, open-access initiatives, and predatory publishing threats.

Literature Review

Current State of Research Infrastructures in African Universities

Research infrastructures in African universities play a prominent role in knowledge production, yet they remain largely underdeveloped due to challenges such as inadequate funding, limited technological resources, and insufficient institutional support. Many African institutions lack state-of-the-art labs, libraries, and digital repositories, which hinders research productivity and dissemination (Akinola, Olagoke, & Opawale, 2024). Furthermore, African academics' exposure to global knowledge trends is severely limited by the lack of well-maintained research databases and limited access to international academic journals (Ocholla, 2020).

The digital divide, which limits access to necessary electronic resources, is another significant issue. Due to inadequate internet access and a lack of digital resources, many African colleges force scholars to use antiquated resources (Gkrimpizi, T., Peristeras, V., & Magnisalis 2023). Furthermore, insufficient funding for data collecting and research equipment has a detrimental effect on the calibre of studies carried out, putting African scholars at a disadvantage in international scholarly debate (Zell, 2025). To overcome these obstacles, more funding must be allocated to digital libraries, research facilities, and data infrastructure to improve Africa's research capacities and raise its level of competitiveness internationally.

Effectiveness of Existing Policy Frameworks in Supporting Research Funding in Africa

The legislative frameworks controlling research financing in Africa are generally fragmented and inconsistently administered, reducing their effectiveness in supporting a vibrant research ecosystem. According to Zell (2025), many African nations lack clear national research policies, which forces them to rely more on outside funding sources than on long-term local support. The majority of research financing comes from foreign

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institutions and international donors, which is advantageous but frequently sets research goals that might not be in line with Africa's developmental needs (Ger, N., Lugossy, AM. & Petrucka Mouton, 2024). Effective distribution and use of research money are also hampered by ineffective bureaucratic procedures and lax enforcement of policies. Researchers find it challenging to obtain grants and financial resources for studies since many universities lack clear funding procedures (Ocholla, 2020). Additionally, the problem is made worse by the government's low investment in research and higher education, as public institutions find it difficult to obtain sufficient funds for their research initiatives (Zell, 2025). African governments must prioritize local research funding, create thorough research policies, and set up accountability systems to guarantee successful money usage if they want to increase the efficacy of their research funding policies. Enhancing collaboration between academia, industry, and policymakers can help drive sustainable research financing models that correspond with Africa’s socioeconomic concerns.

Strategic Interventions and Policy Aimed at Strengthening Africa’s Research Ecosystems

A multifaceted strategy including infrastructure investment, policy reforms, and improved international cooperation is needed to strengthen Africa's research ecosystem. Increasing domestic research funding and lowering dependency on foreign funders is one crucial intervention. To guarantee that universities have steady financial resources, governments must devote a larger portion of GDP to research and higher education (Hong, 2023). Initiatives to increase the capacity to teach academic personnel and researchers sophisticated research techniques and grant-writing techniques are another crucial tactic (Ryan et al., 2024). African institutions can promote knowledge sharing and cooperative studies that tackle regional issues by forming robust research networks and consortia. Furthermore, research exposure and accessibility can be increased by utilizing digital technology to establish institutional repositories and open-access platforms (Ocholla, 2020). Simplifying grant application procedures and guaranteeing money allocation transparency should also be the main goals of policy reforms. Innovation-driven collaborations and extra financial support can be obtained by promoting private sector participation in research financing. Africa can create a strong research ecosystem that promotes academic achievement and sustainable development by putting these strategic actions into practice.

Challenges and Opportunities in Scholarly Publishing

High publishing costs, restricted access to credible journals, and the prevalence of predatory publishing are just a few of the many obstacles facing scholarly publishing in Africa. Due to their inability to pay article processing charges (APCs) for prestigious journals, many African academics are unable to publish in high-impact journals (Nabyonga-Orem et al., 2020). Furthermore, African scholarship is frequently

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marginalized by Western-dominated indexing services, which lowers the visibility of locally produced research (Yankholmes, 2014). Research integrity is seriously threatened by predatory journals, which take advantage of scholars by providing publications with little to no peer review (Mouton, 2020). Because of the pressure to publish and their lack of knowledge about reliable publication venues, many early-career academics become victims of these journals. This problem is made worse by the absence of robust institutional regulations prohibiting predatory publishing (Ocholla, 2020). Notwithstanding these obstacles, African researchers have a lot of options thanks to the growth of open-access publications and digital platforms. Access to locally produced research has improved thanks to initiatives like African Journals Online (AJOL) and institutional repositories, which have raised its profile internationally (Kodua -Ntim, K., & Fombad., 2024). A more inclusive and equitable scholarly publishing environment can also be promoted by more support for open-access laws and financial assistance for African-led publishing projects. The advancement of scholarly publishing in Africa will depend on addressing these issues and taking advantage of new opportunities.

Methodology

The present state of scholarly publication, policy frameworks, and research infrastructures in Africa are examined in this study using a systematic review methodology. Data gathering, screening, and synthesis of pertinent material from reliable academic sources are all part of the research's systematic methodology. The study collected material from reputable academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, African Journals Online, AJOL, and PubMed, to guarantee a thorough analysis. The keywords searched for were "research infrastructures in African universities," "policy frameworks for research funding in Africa," "scholarly publishing in Africa," "open access publishing in Africa," along "predatory publishing in African academia." Between January and April 2024, a total of 150 research items were first downloaded. Papers published between 2015 and 2024; articles published in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, or institutional reports; empirical studies, reviews, and policy analyses about the research topic; and articles directly relevant to African research infrastructures, policy frameworks, or scholarly publishing were the inclusion criteria used to choose pertinent articles. 85 articles were judged appropriate for in-depth study and thematic analysis after these criteria were applied and duplicates or papers with little relevance were eliminated. To find important themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature, the study used qualitative content analysis. Strategic interventions to boost Africa's research ecosystem, the efficiency of legislative frameworks supporting research funding, the current status of research infrastructures in African universities, and possibilities and problems in scholarly publishing are the main topics of the investigation.

Findings of the Study

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The results of this systematic research offer a comprehensive assessment of the academic environment in Africa and insights that can guide institutional improvements and policy proposals. The report also identifies new developments and best practices that may propel long-term advancements in Africa's scholarly publishing and research industries.

1. Current State of Research Infrastructures in African Universities and Their Impact on Knowledge Production and Dissemination

The study concludes that although research infrastructures at African universities have significantly improved, there are still large differences between institutions and areas. While many colleges in Sub-Saharan Africa struggle with issues including outdated library materials, poor laboratory facilities, and restricted access to high-speed internet, well-funded universities in North and South Africa typically have better-equipped research facilities. The efficient distribution of knowledge and the productivity of research are hampered by these infrastructure shortcomings. Furthermore, African research results are not as globally visible or accessible due to a lack of institutional repositories and inadequate digital infrastructures.

2. Effectiveness of Existing Policy Frameworks in Supporting Research Funding, Intellectual Property Rights, and Academic Collaborations in Africa

According to the analysis, African governments and institutions have attempted to create policy frameworks that support intellectual property rights and research funding, but these frameworks are frequently inconsistently implemented and lack long-term financial support; many universities rely on foreign donors and development agencies for research funding, which results in dependency and research agendas that are shaped by external priorities rather than indigenous needs; gaps in intellectual property policies restrict researchers' ability to commercialize their innovations; and academic collaborations are growing, but their full potential is hampered by bureaucratic bottlenecks and weak governance structures.

3. Strategic Interventions and Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Africa’s Research Ecosystems and Fostering Sustainable Academic Publishing Models

Key strategic interventions that are required to revitalize Africa's research landscape are highlighted in the study. These include boosting institutional capacity-building programs, fortifying university-industry partnerships, and expanding domestic research funding. Policy recommendations emphasize the need for governments to allocate at least 1% of GDP to research and development (R&D) in line with the African Union’s target. Additionally, the promotion of open-access publishing models and the establishment of robust digital repositories are critical to enhancing research dissemination and impact. National and regional policies should also focus on improving intellectual property

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protection and fostering a culture of knowledge-sharing and innovation.

4. Challenges and Opportunities in Scholarly Publishing: Access to Reputable Journals, Open-Access Initiatives, and Predatory Publishing Threats

Scholarly publishing in Africa faces persistent challenges, including limited access to high-impact journals, high publishing costs, and the proliferation of predatory journals that exploit researchers. Many African scholars struggle to publish in reputable journals due to stringent peer-review processes, lack of mentorship, and limited research funding. Open-access initiatives present opportunities to democratize knowledge, yet financial constraints make it difficult for institutions to cover article processing charges (APCs). The study underscores the need for collective efforts in promoting African-based high-quality journals, reducing APCs through institutional support, and strengthening research ethics to combat predatory publishing threats. The findings show both the current obstacles and possible solutions for improving Africa's research infrastructures, policies, and scholarly publishing landscape.

Discussion of Findings

Current State of Research Infrastructures in African Universities and Their Impact on Knowledge Production and Dissemination

The results show that although research infrastructures in African universities have advanced significantly, there are still differences in how resources are allocated. Research facilities in countries such as South Africa, Egypt, and Nigeria are relatively well-developed, while universities in less economically stable countries suffer from outdated library resources, poor digital connectivity, and inadequate laboratories. Research infrastructure availability has a direct impact on knowledge production and dissemination, as institutions with stronger support structures generate more globally impactful research (Tedeschi, 2024). However, the visibility of African research outputs is hampered by deficiencies in digital infrastructure, such as restricted access to institutional repositories. According to Oladokun et al. (2024), bolstering digital infrastructures with open-access institutional repositories may improve the impact and accessibility of research.

Effectiveness of Existing Policy Frameworks in Supporting Research Funding, Intellectual Property Rights, and Academic Collaborations in Africa

Despite the establishment of policy frameworks aimed at supporting research funding and intellectual property rights, their effectiveness remains inconsistent. According to the World Bank (2019) and British Council (2025), many African universities rely on external money from international donors, which often affects research objectives to match global rather than local requirements. United Nations Economic Commission for

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Africa (2019) claims that African governments' failure to invest adequate cash for research often falling below the African Union's mandated 1% of GDP for R&D has resulted in insufficient institutional support. Intellectual property (IP) rules in Africa remain inadequate, hampering researchers' capacity to market their ideas (Ncube et al., 2017). Lack of strong intellectual property rights inhibits innovation and reduces the possibility of commercializing research. Additionally, even though academic partnerships are expanding, their full potential is still constrained by governance issues and bureaucratic barriers. Although institutional constraints continue to impede the development of regional collaboration projects like the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), ARUA (2021) emphasizes the significance that these initiatives play in forging cross-border academic connections.

Strategic Interventions and Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Africa's Research Ecosystems and Fostering Sustainable Academic Publishing Models

Stronger university-industry partnerships, more domestic funding, and capacity-building programs are among the major interventions identified in the study as ways to improve Africa's research ecosystem. To create high-calibre African journals, EIFL (2021) highlights that sustainable academic publishing models need to incorporate institutional funding for publishing fees, government support for research, and regional partnerships. Akinola et al. (2022) suggest that digital archives and open-access models are vital for promoting knowledge dissemination, although many universities lack the financial and technological competence to support such programs. Further, SGCI (2024) argues that African policymakers need to prioritize research ethics and peer-review processes to ensure the legitimacy and global competitiveness of African research outputs. A strong research culture in Africa will require policies that support intellectual property protection, sustainable research financing, and the democratization of access to scholarly knowledge. A strong research culture in Africa will require policies that support intellectual property protection, sustainable research financing, and the democratization of access to scholarly knowledge.

Challenges and Opportunities in Scholarly Publishing: Access to Reputable Journals, Open-Access Initiatives, and Predatory Publishing Threats

The ubiquity of predatory publication and restricted access to high-impact journals are just two of the many obstacles facing scholarly publishing in Africa. Many African researchers fall prey to predatory journals because of their high publication costs and lack of mentorship, according to Beall (2017), Olivarez et al. (2018), and Mertkan et al. (2021), who were among the first to recognize predatory publishing as a danger to research integrity. Researchers from underdeveloped regions are disproportionately targeted by predatory journals, which reduces the credibility of their work, according to recent studies (Elmore & Weston, 2020; Science Health Policy, 2023; Shrestha, 2021; Thyo, 2023). Although open-access programs present a viable remedy, institutions

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frequently struggle to pay article processing charges (APCs) due to budgetary limitations.

Conclusion

The study's findings highlight the urgent need for improved research infrastructures, better policy implementation, and sustainable academic publishing models in Africa. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from governments, universities, funding agencies, and international partners to create a resilient and thriving research ecosystem. Strengthening digital infrastructure, promoting ethical publishing, and fostering research collaborations will be instrumental in ensuring Africa's academic competitiveness on the global stage. Research visibility has begun to increase in the meantime thanks to regulations promoting open-access platforms like the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and African Journals Online (AJOL) (Abdui, 2023). However, as suggested by Nwagwu (2019), without stronger regulatory frameworks, the risk of predatory publishing will continue to undermine Africa's academic credibility. Encouraging mentorship programs, strengthening institutional publishing capacities, and fostering ethical publishing practices can mitigate these risks and improve the overall quality of scholarly output.

Recommendations

To advance Africa's research and scholarly publishing landscape, the following recommendations are proposed:

In terms of funding, governments should allocate at least 1% of GDP to research and development, as recommended by the African Union, to ensure financial sustainability for universities and research institutions. There is a need to strengthen Intellectual Property Rights. In light of this, African countries should establish comprehensive IP policies that will encourage innovation and support the commercialization of research outputs.

It is also important to enhance digital infrastructure. Universities should invest in open-access repositories and digital platforms to improve the accessibility and visibility of African research. Another utmost recommendation is there to combat predatory publishing. Therefore, there is a need for awareness campaigns, mentorship programs, and stronger regulatory mechanisms should be implemented to prevent scholars from falling victim to predatory journals.

There is also a need to foster regional and international collaborations. Therefore, it is important to strengthen partnerships through organizations like ARUA and African-based scholarly networks will facilitate knowledge exchange and increase research impact.

Capacity Building for Scholars should also be given priority. African educational institutions should consider providing training on research methodologies, publication ethics, and digital literacy will enhance the quality of scholarly output and academic

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publishing practices.

Implications for Research

This study contributes to the growing discourse on research infrastructures, policies, and publishing in Africa, shedding light on the systemic challenges and opportunities in the region's academic landscape. It highlights the need for more empirical studies on the effectiveness of policy interventions and the role of digital transformations in scholarly communication. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of interdisciplinary and cross-institutional research collaborations to strengthen knowledge production and dissemination. By identifying gaps in research funding, intellectual property regulations, and academic networking, this study provides a foundation for future investigations into optimizing research ecosystems in Africa.

Implications for Practice

The findings suggest that African universities and research institutions must adopt innovative models to enhance their research infrastructure and publishing capacities. Librarians, research administrators, and policymakers should work collaboratively to establish sustainable open-access platforms, improve peer-review standards, and strengthen institutional repositories. The study also points to the need for academic institutions to develop comprehensive training programs that equip scholars with skills in grant writing, research ethics, and scholarly communication. Additionally, addressing the threat of predatory publishing requires stronger regulatory frameworks and awareness campaigns to ensure researchers engage with reputable academic outlets.

Implications for Society

A robust and well-supported research and scholarly publishing system has direct benefits for societal development. When African researchers can produce high-quality, accessible knowledge, it enhances evidence-based policymaking and technological innovation across various sectors, including healthcare, agriculture, and education. Furthermore, increased local research output can help address region-specific challenges, reducing dependency on externally produced knowledge that may not align with Africa's unique contexts. By fostering a culture of rigorous research and ethical publishing, the study ultimately supports the broader goal of sustainable development, social progress, and global competitiveness for African nations.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Limitations of the Study

Despite providing valuable insights into the state of research infrastructures, policy frameworks, and scholarly publishing in Africa, this study has several limitations. First, the study relied on a systematic review of published literature, which may have excluded unpublished reports, grey literature, and informal knowledge-sharing sources that could offer additional perspectives. Second, while the study aimed to cover diverse African


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contexts, research and publishing dynamics vary significantly across regions and institutions, making it challenging to generalize findings to the entire continent. Third, the reliance on secondary data limits the ability to directly assess the impact of policies, funding mechanisms, and scholarly publishing practices on individual researchers and institutions. Additionally, access to subscription-based academic databases may have restricted the inclusion of relevant literature from lower-resourced institutions. Finally, the evolving nature of scholarly publishing, digital transformation, and policy reforms means that some findings may become outdated as innovations emerge.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies should consider empirical approaches, such as interviews and surveys with researchers, policymakers, and academic publishers, to gather first-hand insights into the challenges and opportunities in Africa's research landscape. Longitudinal studies tracking policy implementation, funding allocations, and the impact of research collaborations over time would provide a more dynamic understanding of trends and outcomes. Additionally, comparative studies across different African regions or between African and non-African research ecosystems could highlight best practices and areas requiring further intervention. There is also a need for research on the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and open-access innovations in transforming scholarly publishing in Africa. Lastly, future research should explore mechanisms for protecting African researchers from predatory journals and strengthening ethical publishing practices.

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